

# NGF studies distribution of public golf courses

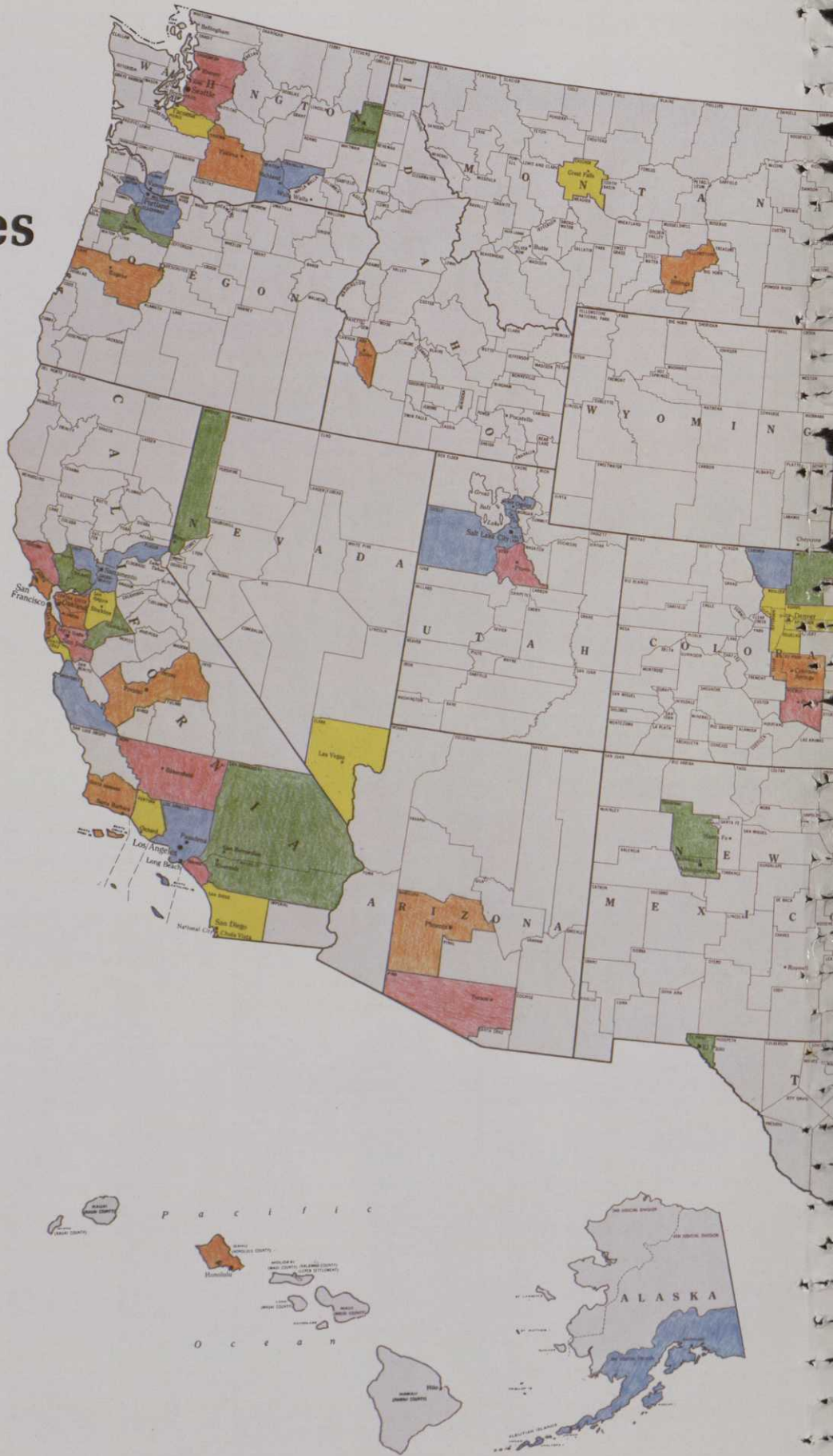
by Scott Scredon, assistant editor, from a study by Ed Wells, director of research & statistics, National Golf Foundation

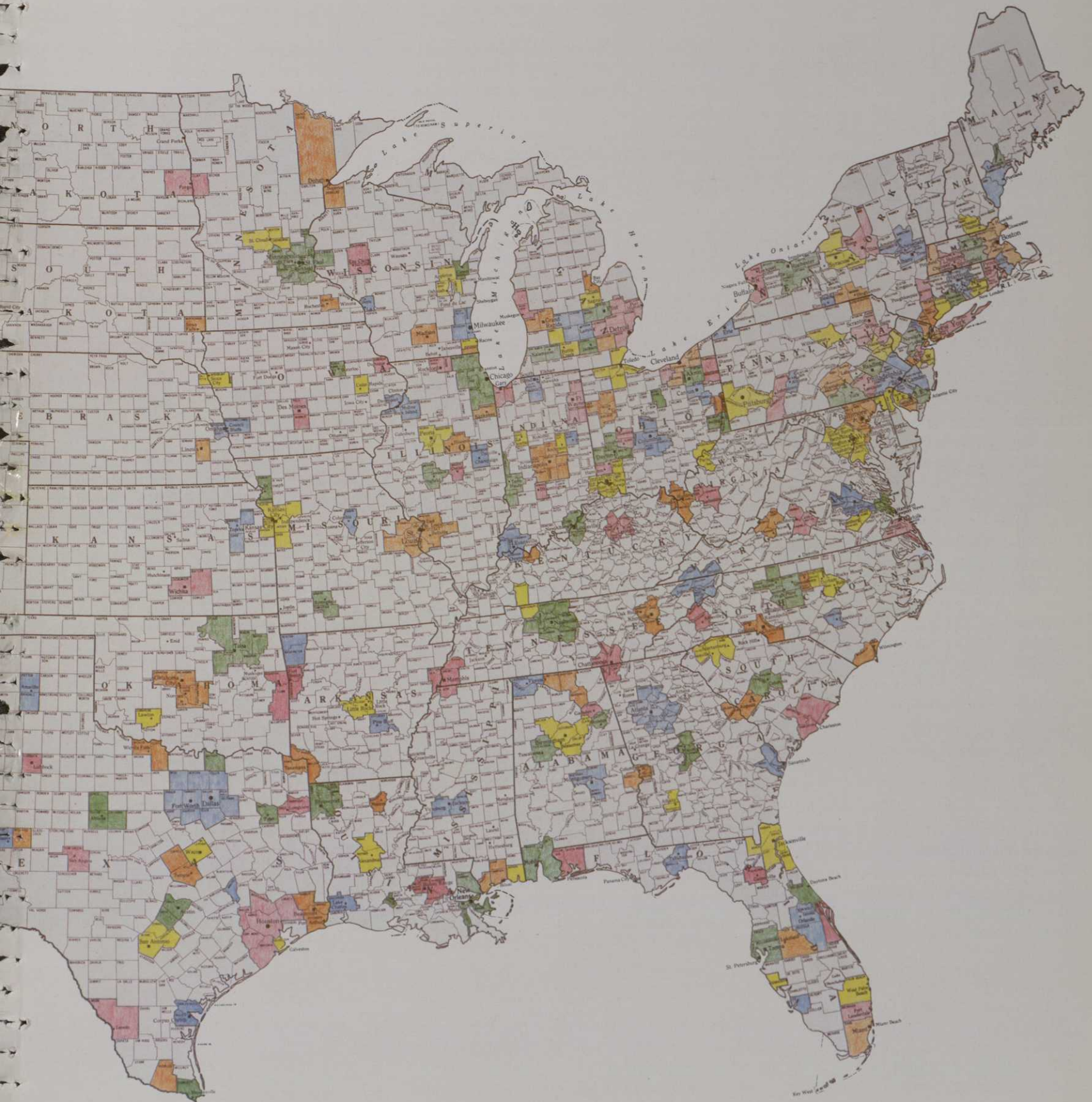
When officials of the National Golf Foundation's player development program begin their push next year to coax America's youth into playing golf, they will probably try harder to place a driver in the hands of a teenager in Johnstown, Pa. or Tyler, Tex., than in Houston or New York City.

The foundation will concentrate its efforts to bring more high-school age persons from suburban areas and smaller cities into the game, rather than from large metropolitan areas, following results of a study completed earlier this year.

The study showed what many golf industry officials probably knew already: that most major metropolitan areas lack the number of public courses needed to stimulate interest in the game, and that persons are fleeing these areas, going even beyond the suburbs to live in small towns and rural environments.

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## DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC COURSES IN THE UNITED STATES

Each of the 259 individually shaded areas represents a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. Included in these areas is 73 percent of the U.S. population, compared to 56 percent of the public golf courses.

Foundation researchers tallied the number of public golf courses in the 259 areas designated as Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA) by the federal government. By also using U.S. Census Bureau population estimates, they could determine the ratio of golf courses to persons in each metropolitan area in the country and decide where their player development program can be most effective.

Based on the study results, the NGF may change the locations where they are trying to develop future golfers. In the past, it has tried to reach the most number of people in one area. This philosophy, however, will change.

"We're going to concentrate on the suburbs and the smaller metropolitan areas. We're going to take our program to areas where there are available golf courses, rather than people," said Ed Wells, NGF's director of research and statistics.

The foundation has held a spattering of golf education seminars this summer in selected cities, including Miami, Los Angeles, and Cheyenne, Wyo. Its six regional directors and 80-part time consultants plan to conduct seminars in high schools across the country next spring.

High school coaches will be contacted and some golf manufacturers will donate clubs and other equipment to the schools, hoping to induce administrators to teach the game in physical education classes. But the program will have to be directed at those youngsters most likely to pursue the sport out of school for the foundation's project to work.

#### **Need people and courses**

Wells expects the foundation to take its program to medium-size metropolitan areas.

"I don't think we'll go down to areas under 200,000," he said.

If so, this means the foundation could be making its pitch in areas like Greenville and Spartanburg, S.C.

An estimated 522,000 persons live in this three-county area in the north-west part of the state near Interstates 85 and 26. It has 14 daily fee and no municipal courses.

This means there are 41,800 per-

sons for each 18-hole public golf course. This is much lower than the average national ratio of 52,500 persons for each public course in an SMSA. The area, therefore would seem to have an adequate number of public courses to handle the amount of potential golfers. (NGF's goal is one public course for every 25,000 persons).

On the other hand, Richmond, Va. and its surrounding six counties do not seem a likely candidate for the foundation's publicity campaign. The estimated 569,500 persons there have

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only eight daily fee courses, including two 9-hole facilities. The ratio is 81,400 persons for each 18-hole course.

It also seems futile to indoctrinate youth to the game in many larger cities. There simply is no place to play.

Hudson County, N.J., which is immediately south of New York City, has one 9-hole daily fee course for its 583,000 residents.

Minneapolis-St. Paul, Chicago, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Milwaukee are the only older metropolitan areas which come close to the average ratio.

In newer large metropolitan regions, however, public courses seem available, according to study results.

San Diego, Portland, and Seattle are near the national SMSA average.

Although Phoenix attracts many wealthy retirees, it has 25 public and 17 executive courses for its 1.2 million residents.

The nation's fastest growing city, however, has a dismal person/public course ratio. There are only 18 courses for Houston's 2.2 million citizens, the study says, compared to 48 private courses.

Poor economic conditions have affected the number of courses in medium and large metropolitan areas of the Deep South. Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Gadsden, Ala., and Shreveport, Baton Rouge, and Alexandria, La., more than double the population average for each 18-hole course. Mobile, Ala. had only one course for every 88,100 persons and New Orleans one for every 99,100.

Public courses are most available and evenly distributed throughout Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Florida.

The smaller and medium-size cities in these six states are especially accessible. Of the 60 areas in these states with less than 1 million persons, 55 were below the average SMSA ratio. □